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TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 616 - JULY 28, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

WARNING NOTICE SENSITIVE SOURCES AND METHODS INVOLVED NOT
RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

1. ISRAEL. BEGIN'S ABILITY TO DOMINATE ISRAELI POLITICS
IS REFLECTED IN THE EASE WITH WHICH HE WON WEDNESDAY'S VOTE
OF CONFIDENCE (BY A 2-1 MARGIN). BEGIN'S PRIMACY IS BASED
ON:

(A) HIS LONG-TIME HEGEMONY WITHIN HERUT, THE PARTY HE
FOUNDED 30 YEARS AGO;

(B) THE CONTINUING DEFERENCE OF THE OTHER PRINCIPAL
COMPONENTS OF THE LIKUD -- THE LIBERAL PARTY AND
LA'AM -- TO HERUT;

(C) THE SOLIDITY OF THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL
RELIGIOUS PARTY (NRP) AND THE LIKUD;

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(D) THE COMMITMENT OF AGUDAT ISRAEL TO COOPERATE
WITH THE LIKUD;

(E) THE POLITICAL INEPTITUDE OF YADIN AND THE ECLIPSE
OF THE DMC; AND

(F) THE POPULAR, POLITICAL, AND PARLIAMENTARY WEAKNESS
OF THE LABOR ALIGNMENT, THE LIKUD'S PRINCIPAL ANTAGONIST.

2. THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF BEGIN'S POWER IS HIS STRENGTH
WITHIN THE ORIENTAL COMMUNITY WHOSE VOTERS CONSTITUTE A
MAJORITY OF THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE. THESE VOTERS HAVE
LONG BEEN RESPONSIVE TO THE ULTRA-NATIONALIST AND ANTI-
ARAB APPEAL OF HERUT, THE KEY ELEMENT OF THE LIKUD. WHILE
MANY ORIENTAL JEWS CONTINUED TO SUPPORT THE SOCIAL DEMO-
CRATIC LABOR PARTY (MAPAI) IN THE 1950S AND 1960S THE
GROUNDSWELL TOWARD HERUT WHICH HAD BEEN BUILDING FOR MANY
YEARS, BECAME AN AVALANCHE IN 1977. THERE IS LITTLE REA-
SON TO BELIEVE THAT THESE VOTERS WILL TURN FROM THE PARTY
THEY HAVE NOW BROUGHT INTO POWER; AND THE CONSERVATIVE
TENDENCIES OF ISRAELI POLITICS WILL WORK IN ITS FAVOR.

3. WITHIN THE ORIENTAL COMMUNITY, BEGIN HAS TRADITIONALLY
BEEN EQUATED WITH HERUT. A STUMP SPEAKER OF UNSURPASSED
POWER, BEGIN IS A FAMILIAR AND REVERED FIGURE TO THESE
VOTERS. ALTHOUGH OTHERS, SUCH AS EZER WEIZMAN, HAVE
BECOME BETTER KNOWN TO THIS PUBLIC SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, THE SUPPORT FOR HERUT FIGURES
BESIDES BEGIN IS THIN.

4. WITHIN THE COALITION, BEGIN'S APPEAL TO THE ORIENTAL
VOTERS AFFORDS HIM TREMENDOUS POLITICAL STRENGTH BY
ENABLING HIM TO INTIMIDATE THE LIBERALS AND LA'AM.
BOTH OF THESE PARTIES HAVE BLOATED KNESSET DELEGATIONS
THANKS TO THEIR ALIGNMENT WITH HERUT. THE QUESTION
WHICH IS OFTEN ASKED -- WILL THE LIBERALS BREAK WITH
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HERUT(?) -- IS IN FACT THE MIRROR IMAGE OF THE POLITICALLY
RELEVANT QUESTION -- WILL HERUT THREATEN TO RUPTURE THE
ALIGNMENT WITH THE LIBERALS AND LA'AM? HERUT COULD EMERGE
AS ISRAEL'S LARGEST PARTY IF IT STOOD ALONE. THE LIBERALS
AND LA'AM, IN CONTRAST, WOULD SUFFER A MAJOR DECLINE WITH-
OUT HERUT. WHATEVER THEIR DISCONTENT WITH BEGIN,
LIBERAL AND LA'AM LEADERS WILL HESITATE TO BREAK WITH HIM
AT THE COST OF THEIR POLITICAL FUTURES.

5. BEGIN'S APPEAL TO ORIENTAL JEWS ALSO AFFECTS THE
HERUT-NRP RELATIONSHIP. THERE IS MUCH TRUTH TO THE CON-
VENTIONAL WISDOM THAT THE NRP IS AVAILABLE AS A COALITION
PARTNER TO LABOR ONLY WHEN LABOR CAN RULE WITHOUT THE NRP.
THE NRP RANK-AND-FILE ADMIRES BEGIN AND EXERTS PRESSURE
ON THE NRP LEADERSHIP FOR A HAWKISH FOREIGN POLICY. MORE-
OVER, THE NRP NEVER REGARDED ITS LONG, SOMETIMES UNCOM-
FORTABLE PARTNERSHIP WITH MAPAI AS SACRED. RATHER, THE
NRP HAS ACTED EXPEDIENTLY TO PROMOTE THE INTERESTS OF
JEWISH ORTHODOXY. THESE INTERESTS HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN
SERVED BY COOPERATION WITH THE RULING PARTY -- MAPAI IN
THE PAST, HERUT IN THE PRESENT. MOREOVER, HERUT HAS GIVEN
MORE SUBSTANTIVE AND SYMBOLIC SATISFACTION TO THE NRP THAN
THE LABOR PARTY CAN, GIVEN LABOR'S SECULARIST BIAS AND THE
STRENGTH OF ANTI-CLERICALIST ELEMENTS IN THE LABOR
ALIGNMENT.

6. THE PRO-RELIGIOUS STANCE OF HERUT AND THE BEGIN
GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE HAVE CONFIRMED THE ULTRA-
ORTHODOX AGUDAT ISRAEL IN ITS RECENT DECISION TO END A
QUARTER OF A CENTURY IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS AND
SUPPORT THE COALITION. IT WOULD NOT BE EASY FOR THE
RABBIS TO GO BACK ON THIS DECISION, ESPECIALLY AS ITS
WISDOM HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED. THE AGUDISTS, WHO TEND TO
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LEAN TO THE DOVISH SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, WOULD
NOT WANT TO JEOPARDIZE ISRAEL'S MOST PRO-RELIGIOUS
GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY AS THE ALTERNATIVE BASED ON LABOR
AND THE DMC WOULD HAVE AN ANTI-CLERICAL TONE.

7. THE OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE POLITICAL EQUATION -- THE DMC AND THE LABOR ALIGNMENT -- ARE NOT A THREAT TO THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. THE DMC IS BADLY FRAGMENTED AND WOULD FARE POORLY IN A NEW ELECTION, IF IT SURVIVES AT ALL.

8. LABOR, FOR ITS PART, REMAINS BESET BY SEVERE PROBLEMS, INCLUDING:

(A) A TARNISHED REPUTATION DERIVING FROM PAST SCANDALS AND INCOMPETENCE;

(B) INTERNAL PERSONAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND FACTIONAL CONFLICTS;

(C) LACK OF SUPPORT FROM ISRAEL'S ORIENTAL COMMUNITY.
(SECRET)

9. LEBANON. FIGHTING WAS REDUCED TO OCCASIONAL SNIPER FIRE YESTERDAY. LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF) TOOK UP POSITIONS ALONG A PORTION OF THE CONFRONTATION LINE BETWEEN THE RIGHTISTS AND THE SYRIANS. SECURITY SOURCES WERE QUOTED AS SAYING THAT SMALL GROUPS OF GENDARMES HAD BEGUN TAKING UP POSITIONS IN HADATH AND IN THE COMMERCIAL SECTION OF BEIRUT. DESPITE THE ENTRY OF THE ISF, THERE WAS NO INDICATION THAT SYRIAN TROOPS OR THE MILITIAS WERE ABANDONING THEIR STRONGHOLDS.

10. THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR HAS BRED A GENERATION OF YOUNG CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM FANATICS WHO EXERCISE LITTLE POLITICAL POWER BUT COMMAND SMALL PARAMILITARY FORCES CAPABLE OF INFLAMING TENSE SITUATIONS. ONE OF THE MOST
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ACTIVE OF THESE LEADERS IN THE MARONITE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS ETIENNE SAQR, LEADER OF THE RIGHTWING "GUARDIANS OF THE CEDARS," WHO IS BETTER KNOWN BY HIS NOM DE GUERRE "ABU ARZ," (FATHER OF THE CEDAR).

11. SAQR CULTIVATES AN IMAGE OF MYSTERY AND LITTLE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON HIS BACKGROUND. HE APPARENTLY HAS LONG BEEN ATTRACTED TO THE HARD-LINE MARONITE POSITION OF SHAMUN. SAQR EVIDENTLY PREFERS TO OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY OF SHAMUN'S NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY, ALTHOUGH HE COOPERATES CLOSELY WITH SHAMUN'S "TIGER" MILITIAMEN AS WELL AS THE PHALANGES PARTY.

12. SAQR'S "GUARDIANS" ARE BELIEVED TO NUMBER ONLY SEVERAL HUNDRED FIGHTERS LOCATED PRIMARILY IN THE CHRISTIAN ASHRAFIYA QUARTER OF EAST BEIRUT, ALTHOUGH HE CLAIMS TO HAVE 3,000 MILITIAMEN. HIS SUPPORTERS SEEM TO BE DRAWN FROM THE WORKING CLASS OF THE CITY -- MUCH AS MUSLIM

LEFTIST LEADERS DRAW THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE URBAN POOR. SAQR'S FORCES HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE THREE MAJOR SYRIAN-CHRISTIAN CLASHES THIS YEAR AND PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE CHRISTIAN SIEGE OF THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP AT TAL AL-ZAATAR IN AUGUST 1976.

13. SAQR'S POLITICAL PROGRAM IS ENCAPSULATED IN HIS SLOGAN "NOT ONE PALESTINIAN SHALL REMAIN ON LEBANON'S TERRITORY" HE BLAMES THE PALESTINIANS FOR ALL OF LEBANON'S PROBLEMS AND CALLS FOR THE EXPULSION OF ALL PALESTINIANS FROM THE COUNTRY AND THE EXPROPRIATION OF THEIR PROPERTY. HE IS EQUALLY HOSTILE TO THE SYRIAN PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN LEBANON; EVEN WHEN THE SYRIANS AND CHRISTIANS WERE ALLIED IN 1976, SAQR OPPOSED THEIR PRESENCE.

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14. BEYOND HATING THE PALESTINIANS AND SYRIANS, SAQR'S POLITICAL PROGRAM IDENTIFIES SEVERAL OTHER "ENEMIES OF LEBANON": THE PRESS; "ARABISM"; THE "TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS" EXCEPT, OF COURSE, MARONITE LEADERS JUMAYYIL AND SHAMUN; THE "LEFT"; THE "CAPITALISTS AND UPPER CLASS"; AND "FOREIGNERS," MEANING NON-LEBANESE ARABS.

15. SAQR OFFERS ONLY FORCE AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE HIS OBJECTIVES. "THE MILITARY SOLUTION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION," HE ARGUES, AND HE CHARACTERIZES THE EFFORTS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS TO NEGOTIATE AN END TO LEBANON'S PROBLEMS AS "WEAK AND SICK."

16. SAQR CLAIMS THAT MUSLIMS ARE WELCOME TO JOIN HIS MOVEMENT, AND HE PUBLICLY REJECTS A PARTITION OF LEBANON THAT WOULD CREATE SEPARATE CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM STATES. SAQR'S GOALS, HOWEVER, IS PROBABLY TO MAINTAIN THE MARONITES' TRADITIONAL HEGEMONY IN LEBANON.

17. SAQR IS ALSO A STRONG ADVOCATE OF CLOSE CHRISTIAN-ISRAELI TIES. RELIABLE INFORMATION INDICATES THAT HE HAS TRAVELED TO ISRAEL CLANDESTINELY AND RECEIVES ISRAELI ARMS. ONE LEBANESE SOURCE CHARACTERIZES HIM AS "MORE ISRAELI THAN THE ISRAELIS."

18. BY HIMSELF, SAQR IS INSIGNIFICANT. HE REPRESENTS, HOWEVER, THE EXTREME RIGHT WITHIN THE MARONITE CAMP, AND HE ESPOUSES PUBLICLY WHAT MANY CHRISTIANS PROBABLY PRIVATELY BELIEVE. IN THE CHARGED ATMOSPHERE OF LEBANESE POLITICS, HE IS ONE OF MANY FANATICS SEEKING TO LIGHT THE FUSE. (SECRET/NOFORN)

19. EGYPT. EMBASSY CAIRO JUDGES THAT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN EGYPT ARE SUCH, IN LIGHT OF AN OVERALL IMPROVEMENT IN EXTERNAL FINANCES DURING THE PAST YEAR, THAT THE

LIKELIHOOD OF SERIOUS DISTURBANCES THREATENING THE
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POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR SPECIFICALLY ECONOMIC REASONS IS
SLIGHTLY LESS THAN IN JANUARY 1977. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER,
THAT A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE SOCIETY IS ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED, AND KNOWS IT. DISSATISFACTION WITH THEIR
LOT COULD BRING THE URBAN POOR OUT INTO THE STREETS AGAIN,
A FACT WHICH SERIOUSLY CONCERNS THE GOVERNMENT. ONLY
CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY, WITH THE BENEFITS
THEREFROM WIDELY SHARED, WILL SERVE TO ELIMINATE THIS
POTENTIAL DANGER. THE EMBASSY ALSO NOTES, HOWEVER, THAT
ITS ASSESSMENT DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT OTHER STRICTLY
POLITICAL FACTORS, SUCH AS CORRUPTION AND THE PEACE
PROCESS, WHICH COULD RADICALLY INFLUENCE POLITICAL EVENTS.
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